

REMARKS

In the Office Action, the Examiner rejected Claims 1-20, which were all of the then pending claims, under 35 U.S.C. 103. In particular, Claims 1-4, 6-10, 12-16 and 18 were rejected as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent 5,315,504 (Lemble) in view of U.S. Patent 6,712,921 (Altman); and Claims 5, 11 and 17 were rejected as being unpatentable over Lemble in view of Altman and further in view of U.S. patent application publication no. 2002/0007324 (Centner, et al.). Claim 19 was rejected as being unpatentable over Lemble in view of Altman and further in view of U.S. patent application no. 2002/0184255 (Edd, et al.), and Claim 20 was rejected as being unpatentable over Lemble in view of Altman and further in view of Official Notice. Also, the Examiner's previous decision to withdraw Claim 19 from consideration in this application as being directed to a constructively non-elected invention, was itself withdrawn.

Independent Claims 1, 7 and 13 are being amended to better define the subject matters of these claims. New Claim 21, which is dependent from Claim 1, is being added to describe a preferred feature of the invention. Claims 2, 8 and 14 are being withdrawn to reduce the number of issued in this application. Also, the rejection of Claim 20 is respectfully traversed.

For the reasons discussed below, Claims 1, 3-7, 9-13 and 15-21 patentably distinguish over the prior art because the prior art does not disclose or suggest the feature of recalculating the approver list, including substituting for names on the list, each time one of at least some of the approvers act on the requisition proposal, as described in independent Claims 1, 7 and 13.

To best understand this feature, and its significance, it may be helpful to review briefly this invention and the prior art.

This invention relates to an approval process in an electronic requisitioning system. As discussed in the present application, with computer and computer networks becoming commonplace, businesses are beginning to use electronic requisition systems more and more. One important part of many requisition systems is the approval, usually internal of the business, of a proposal for a requisition.

Present electronic requisition systems have significant limitations. One of these limitations is that there may be lengthy delays before all the approvals are obtained, especially if one or more of the approvers are not available for several days or longer.

The present invention effectively addresses this issue. This is done by providing an electronic requisitioning system including an electronic list of approvers that is recalculated to take into account the availability of the approvers, and, in particular, by recalculating that list to account for delegation of approval authority.

The list is recalculated each time one of at least some of the approvers acts on the proposal. Specifically, if one of the approvers who has not acted on the proposal has delegated approval authority to another person, the name of that other person is substituted for the name of that one approver on the list.

For example, if one approver needs to be absent for a period of time, that approver may delegate his or her approval authority to another person. With the present invention, the list of approvers is recalculated to take into account this delegation of approval authority. As a result, the approval process does not have to wait to be completed until the absent approver returns.

The prior art does not disclose or suggest updating the list of approvers in the above-discussed manner.

Lemble, for instance, describes a document approval system in which electronic facilities are used to review and approve documents. In this system an approval path is computed, and displays are shown to a user to inform the user of, for example, the name of the previous approver.

Altman discloses a method and system for generating workflow messages based on adding annotations to a file repository or database. The annotations are stored separately in a searchable annotation repository, and in this way, the original documents can be preserved unchanged while still providing the ability to comment on the original document. Also, the system keeps track of who has reviewed the documents.

In the Office Action, the Examiner noted that Lemble, for example, in column 8, lines 44-61, refers to a delegated function. The Examiner also argued that Altman discloses changing a list by removing the names of people who have reviewed a paper. There is no disclosure or teaching in these references, though, of substituting one name for another each time one of at least some of the approvers acts on the list.

This substitution, which is done in the present invention, is very different from the procedure described in Altman. To elaborate, removing a name from the list once that person has given approval, as is done in Altman, does not mean that this person is no longer an approver – it simply means that his or her approval has been given. The present invention is different. When the name of an approver is changed from the name of one person to the name of another person, that former person is no longer an approver – that authority has been given to the latter person.

Independent Claims 1, 7 and 13 are being amended to describe this feature of the present invention more expressly. In particular, each of these claims describes the feature that the list of approvers is recalculated, each time one of at least some of said approvers acts on the proposal, to change the names of the approvers on the list by, if one of the approvers has delegated approval authority to another person, substituting the name of said another person for the name of said one of the approvers.

This aspect of the present invention is of significant utility because it helps to avoid or reduce delays in case one of the initial approvers becomes absent or unavailable. With the instant invention, that absence or unavailability does not need to delay the requisition approval process.

The other references of record have been reviewed, and these other references, whether considered individually or in combination, also do not disclose or suggest this feature of this invention.

For instance, Centner, et al. discloses a Web-based server that facilitates communications and commercial transactions between buyers and suppliers. In the disclosed procedure, a buyer initiates a request for quotation or a request for proposal, and a group of possible suppliers are notified of that request. These suppliers can bid on the request, and one supplier may be selected to provide the requested products or services.

The procedure described in Centner, et al. has several special features. For instance, the bidding process may be conducted in various ways, and the bidding suppliers may be notified of each other's bids. An electronic database of preferred suppliers may be maintained, and much of the communications between the buyers and possible suppliers is done electronically.

Thus, Centner et al. is directed to communications between buyers and sellers, while the present invention is directed to the process for approving a proposal for a requisition. In addition, Centner, et al. does not disclose or suggest recalculating any list of approvers, at defined times, to substitute new names for the names of the approvers on the list.

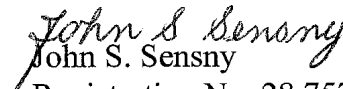
In view of the above-discussed differences between Claims 1, 7 and 13 and the prior art, and because of the advantages associated with those differences, Claims 1, 7 and 13 patentably distinguish over the prior art and are allowable. Claims 3-6 and 19-21 are dependent from Claim 1 and are allowable therewith. Also, Claims 9-12 are dependent from Claim 7 and are allowable therewith; and Claims 15-18 are dependent from, and are allowable with, Claim 13. The Examiner is thus also requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejection of Claims 1, 3-7, 9-13 and 15-20 under 35 U.S.C. 103, and to allow these Claims and new Claim 21.

In addition, the rejection of Claim 20 is respectfully traversed because there is no support for the Examiner's "official notice" that, after approval has been delegated from one person to another and the name on the approval list has been changed from the name of that first person to the name of that another person, it would have been obvious for that first person later to resume authority and to pull the name of that first person back onto the list at a later time. Applicants respectfully submit that it would not be obvious to do this.

When the first person delegates authority, it is not obvious that this person will later resume authority. For one reason, the need to exercise authority may have been eliminated in the interim. Also, authority may be kept with the person to whom it was delegated. Because of these reasons, it is not obvious that the first person's name would be later put back onto the approval list, as described in Claim 20.

For the reasons set forth above, the Examiner is requested to reconsider and to withdraw the rejections of Claims 1, 2-7, 9-13 and 15-20 under 35 U.S.C. 103, and to allow these claims and new Claim 21. If the Examiner believes that a telephone conference with Applicants' Attorneys would be advantageous to the disposition of this case, the Examiner is asked to telephone the undersigned.

Respectfully submitted,


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